



Baroness Barran

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Lord Watson of Invergowrie
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7 January 2022

Dear Mike,

Following the Oral Statement repeat on Child Safeguarding and the death of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes on 6 December, I am writing to you to provide further details on the implementation plan to support vulnerable children.

As you mentioned, the Public Accounts Committee recommended in 2019:

The Department (for Education) should write to us setting out the quality of children's social care it is seeking to achieve by 2022 and how it will measure this. It should specify a percentage target for how many authorities it is aiming to be rated as "Good" or "Outstanding" by 2022.

The former Department for Education Permanent Secretary Jonathan Slater responded to the Committee in 2019:

From a low of only two in 2017, eight local authorities are now judged 'Outstanding', and 61 are 'Good'. This is in part because of our success where we have intervened, and in part because of the impact of our wider reforms, in particular, perhaps, the Innovation Programme. We have also, as discussed with the Committee, begun to implement improvement programmes to move upstream and prevent failure before it happens. The improvement structures that we have in place, working in partnership with ADCS and LAs, should also enable more authorities to flourish and gain good or outstanding ratings.

However, we are not in a position to set a percentage target. While we want to be ambitious, as I have already set out, the outcome of the SR, both for this Department's budgets and for local authority budgets, will be crucial in determining how far and how fast we are able to go.

As you will be aware, since 2020, the Department for Education have focussed on dealing with the impacts of the pandemic and consecutive one year Spending Reviews. However, the Department's implementation of improvement and innovation programmes for children's social care has not stopped, and I am pleased to be able to write and update you as to their progress.

The current improvement and intervention programme is set up to prevent failure and to respond swiftly to local authorities who are judged Inadequate by Ofsted, with the aim of 10% or fewer local authorities being rated Inadequate by 2022. The number of Inadequate local authorities has fallen from 30 in April 2017 to 19 currently (13%).

Whilst there is no set target for the percentage of local authorities judged Good or Outstanding, performance has improved since we strengthened our approach to improvement in 2018. The number of local authorities rated Outstanding has increased by 16 since April 2017 – and at present there are 19 Outstanding LAs. Currently, 51% of local authorities are judged Good or Outstanding, compared to 36% at the end of March 2017.

Furthermore, we are seeing our interventions bring results. 50 local authorities have been lifted out of intervention since May 2010 and have not returned. We assisted all Inadequate services that were re-inspected in 2019 to move up in their Ofsted rating. I was also delighted to see Sunderland move from Inadequate in 2015 to Outstanding in 2021, with DfE support.

The Department also continues to strengthen joint work with the sector through;

- Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliances (RIAs) which bring together key partners (DfE, LGA, ADCS and SOLACE) in each region to develop a system that enables the identification of areas at risk of failure and to construct an offer of sector-led improvement support.
- The £24m Regional Recovery and Build Back Better Fund for children's social care which is designed to support local authorities to work together, through RIAs, to identify priorities where a regional approach would be beneficial.
- Facilitating and funding peer support through the Sector Led Improvement Partner programme. More than 65 local authorities have received DfE-funded peer support since 2018.
- Investing £3m over the next three years to support improved corporate and political leadership, working with the LGA. Over 95% of local authorities have benefited from the programme since 2018.

I was pleased when the Chancellor was able to announce a 3-year Spending Review settlement earlier this year. This will enable the department and local authority leaders to budget and plan effectively for the medium and long term and to continue our excellent joint working on improvement of services for vulnerable children and their families. I am also looking forward to the recommendations of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care. The review is taking a fundamental look at the needs, experiences and outcomes of the children it supports, and what is needed to make a real difference. I look forward to the review reporting in the spring. We want this review to contribute to ambitious and deliverable reforms, and inform the strategy for our next phase of improvements to children's social care.

I hope this answer has been useful and I will place a copy in the House Libraries.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Diana Barran".

BARONESS BARRAN

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE